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AUTHOR Pavan, Barbara Nelson; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Despite the passage of affirmative-action legislation over the last 25 years, the percentage of women school superintendents has increased at a very slow pace. This paper compares the results of three separate research studies that examined women superintendents in Pennsylvania. One study was conducted in 1985 and the other two were conducted in 1993. The women superintendents in the studies matched the career aspirations of their male counterparts but put forth greater efforts to obtain their positions. Although the female administrators of 1993 were older, more likely to have a doctorate, more likely to be married, and somewhat more experienced than the 1985 respondents, they shared a strong motivation to make schools a good place for children to learn. In addition, the women had to demonstrate "toughness" and the ability to survive in the male-dominated world of educational administration. A conclusion is that an increased proportion of women administrators is more likely to foster collaboration than competition within the organization. Men have an ethic of justice while women have an ethic of caring or responsibility for others. The increase in women leaders must be accompanied by a change in societal attitudes toward the role of women and the value of nurturing. (LMI)

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EIGHT YEARS LATER : HAS THE SUPERINTENDENCY CHANGED FOR WOMEN ?

Barbara Nelson Pavan, Temple University
Brenda A. Winkler, Marple-Newtown School District, PA
Pat E. Dovey, Littlestown School District, PA

Dr. Barbara Nelson Pavan
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Temple University 003-00
Philadelphia, PA 19122
(215) 204-6167

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

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EIGHT YEARS LATER :

HAS THE SUPERINTENDENCY CHANGED FOR WOMEN ?

Objectives

To determine if female superintendents report that the situations which they face are different from those reported eight years ago. While many of these same women remain in the office, their responses might differ due to longer tenure in the job. Also how does the present group of women differ, if at all, from those holding the superintendency eight years ago ?

Perspectives / Theoretical Framework

In spite of affirmative action efforts including the passage of Title IX in 1972 and the Glass Ceiling Act of the Civil Rights Act of 1991, the percentage of school superintendents who are women has been merely creeping up at a very slow pace. This continues to puzzle us since by 1990, women earned 59% of the master's degrees in educational administration and 51% of the doctoral degrees (Snyder, 1992). During the years from 1970 to 1980 less than 1% of the superintendents in Pennsylvania were women. In 1985 (Pavan) only 18 (3.6 %) of the Pennsylvania superintendents were women, a figure slightly larger than the national level. In the other studied school year (1992-1993), 28 women held this role or 5.6% of the positions. It was quite a surprise to learn that as of the 1994-1995 school year, there are now 50 female superintendents in Pennsylvania, an astounding jump to 10 %. As delightful as this change is to contemplate, there exists in this state a sufficient number of certified and experienced women to more than double this number. National data complied by Glass (1992) which includes K-8 districts that are not found in Pennsylvania, determined that 6.4 % of the superintendents were women.

The lack of female school administrators cannot be blamed on the

women's unwillingness to get the needed credentials or to make extensive job search efforts (Pavan, 1988, b). Rather than lose the optimism of previous years, it was instructive to determine if female superintendents reported any changes in their situations.

Methods / Data Sources

This paper looked at three separate studies, one conducted during the fall of 1985 and two conducted in the spring of 1993, an eight plus years difference in time. Each of these studies involved women in the superintendent position in the state of Pennsylvania. The first study was a 1985 mailed survey sent to both male and female holders of all levels of administrative certificates in the state of Pennsylvania. A Likert response was used for the majority of Pavan's questions. A series of papers looking at both aspiring and incumbent administrators was generated from those data (Pavan, 1986, 1987a, 1987b,1987c,1988a, 1988b, Pavan and McKee, 1988). Reanalysis of the original surveys in addition to previously published analyses on the female incumbent superintendents, 72% of whom responded, provided the data for this paper.

The second source of information, a study conducted by Winkler (1994) in the Spring of 1993, was a mailed survey that consisted of a researcher-developed questionnaire generally formatted so that the respondent checked a given number of items for each category. In addition, the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) was completed by the 22 respondents for a 73% return rate. Computer print outs of the collected data were available in addition to the original published study.

The third source was the published document of the study conducted by Dovey (1994) which consisted of telephone interviews during the Spring of 1993 based on Flanagan's critical incident technique. She asked a series of open ended questions which focused

on critical incidents that influenced the women to seek their first administrative and superintendent position. Other questions concerned their skills and characteristics and the role gender played in their career advancement. Twenty of the 27 possible candidates followed through for a 74% response rate.

Results

Half of the 18 women who were superintendents in 1985 have retired, but the other nine remained in that position during the 1992-1993 school year when the group numbered 28. While nine women responded to all three studies, only three of the 28 did not respond to any request. All but four responded to either the Pavan or the Winkler surveys. Fifteen responded to both Winkler's survey and Dovey's interview. Thirteen participated in Pavan's original 1985 survey of those holding administrative certificates at all levels, although at the time of responding six had not yet obtained the superintendency. Not only did each study have a high response rate, but usage of three different studies and with additional data available from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the views of female superintendents during both time periods are more than adequately represented. The only difficulty is that the studies were not originally designed for cross comparisons. The three reported studies covered two time periods with an eight year difference, the 1985-1986 (Pavan, 1988a) and 1992-1993 (Dovey, 1994; Winkler, 1994) school years.

Personal Characteristics

In 1985 over half the female superintendents were first-born or only children, but only one-third of the 1993 group. The average age of the female superintendent respondents was 48 in 1985 and 52 in 1993. Current marital status was 54% in 1985 and 64% in 1993 with very few women in either group responsible for minor children.

Doctorates were held by 69% of the earlier group and 73% of the later group. Not surprisingly the years of experience as a superintendent show considerable difference. In 1985, 77% of the women had been in the position for fewer than five years with only 36% in 1993. Those with 11 years or more years of superintendency experience in 1985 were 8% and in 1993 were 18%. While no one in the later group reported any interruptions during their administrative careers, one of the earlier group took a family leave from a secondary principalship and nearly half of the group had taken study leaves during the early part of their educational careers.

Motivation

While encouragement from others motivated some respondents in both groups to obtain administrative certification or seek the superintendency; the majority were influenced by a desire to make a difference for students or to improve education, for a greater job challenge, because they enjoyed leadership, or felt that they could do the job as well as others. The desire for higher income motivated 23% of the 1993 group (Winkler) and 15% of the 1985 group (Pavan). The need for status or prestige was cited by 23% of the first group, but only 5% of the second group.

When Dovey (1994) asked the female superintendents to relate critical incidents that impacted on their decision to enter administration, 65% indicated positive incidents and 85% mentioned negative incidents such as

"I did not have the support of my father, who was not for me getting into administration..."(Superintendent I, p. 54)

"I applied all over Pennsylvania and I could not get an administrative position....I was even told I was too small." (Superintendent N, p. 54)

The remembered negative incidents were reduced to 55% when seeking the superintendency was the focus. The following positive incidents are examples:

"...really two incidents ... a professor who told me I'd make an excellent superintendent ... and I lost my job...through political rearrangement. ... I was certified and it was the most logical place to go." (Superintendent I, p.58)

"As long as I was doing all the work and making many decisions because the superintendent was going through a difficult personal time, I absolutely might as well have the advantage of being the superintendent." (Superintendent H, p. 57).

Through the observation of others in the role and their own successful experiences, many women (Dovey, 1994) realized they were as, or even more, capable than many men holding the role of the superintendent.

Mentors

Mentors, usually male superintendents or professors, had assisted 85% of the women in the earlier study and 82% in the later study (Winkler, 1994). Women reported more female mentors as they advanced in their administrative career in the 1993 study, but the dominance of male mentorships continued as a function of the lack of women holding higher level administrative positions so that they could serve as mentors. Female superintendents rated much more highly than their male counterparts both the career and psychological mentoring functions (Pavan, 1987c).

Work and Household Responsibilities

Superintendents in 1985 reported the average career and household responsibilities each work week as 80.5 hours for women and 71 hours for men even though 76% of the women employed household

help. However, both men (58 hours) and women (59 hours) spent the same amount of time on the job (Pavan, 1987a). Only 45% of the women in Winkler's survey reported having paid help to assist with household responsibilities.

Barriers to Advancement

The following barriers were noted by the 1985 women as they ascended to the superintendency: not encouraged (46%), insufficient time (33%), visibility as a woman (31%), no peer network (25%), and lack job title (23%). Winkler's respondents checked gender discrimination (48%), familiar responsibilities (33%), and lack of local employment opportunities (24%) as the most frequent obstacles to administrative advancement. The difference in response levels could be due to the questionnaire formats; Pavan (1986) had a list of barriers to be rated as to degree of difficulty while Winkler asked the respondents to check three factors from a list that were seen as obstacles. Lack of financial skills was the only hindrance noted by Dovey's respondents, 25% of the group, yet only 8% of Pavan's group noted this as a barrier.

Strategies for Advancement and Job Search

Strategies that involve others such as demonstrate competence, offer help to administrators, visibility on the job, and attend conferences were utilized by 87% or more of the female superintendents in the earlier study. Persevere professionally and maintain a professional demeanor were strategies controlled by self that were utilized by 100% of these women (Pavan, 1986).

Networks were actively pursued by 41% of Winkler's respondents and found to be helpful to 67%. Pavan's group reported that 46% joined a support network, while 25% saw the lack of a peer network as a barrier to advancement.

Female superintendents indicated to Dovey (1994) that the following skills which they possessed helped them to attain the superintendency: interpersonal (80%), educational background (75%), communication (55%), leadership (55%), organization (45%), with intelligence and high energy cited by 35%.

Winkler asked respondents to rate a list of resources for success which were rated as very important with few exceptions. More than 95% of the 1993 group felt the superintendency required interaction skills, flexibility, planning skills, tenacity, organization skills, decision-making skills, conflict management skills, the ability to delegate, and an understanding of politics.

The 1985 women had searched for seven months and submitted 4 applications to find their first administrative job, but needed eight months and 19 applications for their first superintendency. Only 8% noted lack of geographic mobility as a barrier and 62% of the group had applied for jobs which required them to relocate their residence. They used each of the listed job search strategies more so than any other administrative groups in the survey. (Pavan, 1988b). Mobility was cited by 25% of Dovey's respondents as contributing to obtaining a superintendent position. No other data were available on job search.

Career Paths

Only about half of the 1985 women followed the typical male line career path in which all but one of their administrative jobs had line rather then staff responsibility. This lack of a single career path for women had been documented by other researchers in Pavan and McKee (1988). The earlier group of women reached the superintendency by moving through fewer line administrative positions, than the later group. The first line administrative position was superintendent for 15% of the 1985 group, but none of the 1993 group

(Winkler, 1994). The second position for 46% of the early and 36% of the later group (Winkler's computer data sheets) was the superintendency; the third was 31% and 41%; and the fourth was 8% and 18%, respectively. All members of the early group were superintendents by the fourth administrative position, but 5% of the later finally achieved that level with the fifth administrative position.

Their ultimate career goal (Pavan, 1987b) was to remain a superintendent (72.7%) or to seek a professorship (18.2%). Neither of the other studies probed this issue.

Evidence for Personality Characteristics

While this area was not a major focus for Pavan's survey, it was absolutely clear that these female superintendents had very positive self images. Not one reported low aspirations, low job perseverance, low self confidence, being unsure of their administrative ability, or unsure of their life's goals.

Leadership preferences obtained via the MBTI by Winkler (1993, pp. 76-78) showed respondents distributed across 10 of the 16 MBTI categories with 27% in the ENTJ (Extroversion, iNtuition, Thinking, Judgment) "take charge" people category. These women prefer to focus on the outer world of people and things, acquire and seek information beyond the obvious surface meanings and sense other possibilities, make their decisions objectively, and are oriented toward a structured and organized outer world. She reports that other studies of executive educators have found similar results. ENTJ's descriptors included challenging, decisive, fair, logical, and straightforward. They prefer efficient systems, structure, complex problems and working with people. ENTJ's manage in a direct and tough style when needed and provide a long-range organizational vision.

Dovey (1994) classified the critical incidents that led each woman into the first administrative position and the superintendency into three categories: Personal, attributing cause or action to one's self; Intervention, interactions with another person(s) that trigger a positive or negative reaction which can lead a person to some action; and Evolvement, a series of events that happens external to the person and/or in a natural course of events. The latter category was least frequently noted. The women tended to attribute success to themselves only after it was pointed out to them by someone else. Also contributing to this increased self-confidence was the realization that they had developed most of the skills needed for the superintendency. Critical incidences in which the cause or action was attributed to self were related by 70% of the female superintendents.

Discussion

As documented by Pavan's gender comparative study (1988) these women superintendents have aspirations as great as men and have made much greater efforts to obtain their positions. This contrasts with Shakeshafts's (1989) summary of the research which stated "...she'll try again only once or twice and then cease pursuing administration" (p.67).

While the women superintendents in 1993 are a few years older, more likely to have a doctorate, more likely to be married, and are somewhat more experienced than those in 1985; they share the same basic characteristics of drive and initiative that have propelled them to seek to run America's schools. They are motivated by the desire to make schools good places for children to learn and they believe that through their own leadership they can make this happen.

Since women are hired by school boards composed predominantly of men, the women have had to show that they could be "tough" and

survive in a man's world. The world of school administration remains masculine even though there has been nearly two decades of supposed efforts to achieve gender equity. In fact, at this point in time there is a definite backlash against continued affirmative action efforts. Is 10% supposed to be gender equity such that there is no longer a need to look at this issue ?

Would schools be different places if they were run by women ? Gilligan (1982) believes that men have an ethic of justice while women have an ethic of caring or responsibility for others. Shakeshaft (1989) indicates that the communication and decision-making styles of women foster collaboration. Reclaiming Educational Administration As a Caring Profession (Beck, 1994) suggests that the cultivation of community and personal development should be employed as strategies toward educational improvement. She reconceptualizes educational administration upon an ethic of caring. School systems might become less bureaucratic and move toward participatory models as discussed by Ortiz and Marshall (1988), if women administrators were the norm rather than the "visible tokens" in the school structure (Kanter, 1977). There is no large institutional group where the majority of the top level administrators are women, but one could speculate that such an arrangement would be more likely to foster collaboration than competition within the organization. However, it might be necessary to have a critical mass of women in all key administrative positions to facilitate such a cultural shift. Given external forces such as the parents and the business community pressing for a rational-masculine organizational model, quite a few years with a different environment might be necessary before there would be evidence of a different perspective. Without changes in societal attitudes toward the role of women and the value of nurturance and those who do the nurturing,

schools as institutions may remain much as they have been for generations: women teaching children while men manage the adults and the resources.

In the meantime, the women who head our school systems will still need to prove that they can be as masculine (business-like and rational problems solvers) as men while at the same time not neglecting their feminine sides (care and concern for both their own families and for their school families) all within a twenty-four hour day ! This role conflict so demanding of a woman's time will continue until men share equally the responsibility of caring. Once this happens, work organizations could be restructured to enable workers to assume the multiple roles presently undertaken mostly by women.

Point of View / Educational Importance

As long as there exists such a great discrepancy between the numbers of women certified for administrative positions and those hired, it is necessary to keep looking at gender and administrative careers. Pavan (1985) pointed out that if during the previous seven years all administrative positions that became vacant in Pennsylvania were filled by certified women, then 75% of the administrative positions would have been held by women. This longitudinal look at female superintendents may shed some light on the issue or at least keep gender disequity shining under a bright beacon.

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